



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Helene Nelson, Secretary

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Nelson, Underheim, Toussaint Column:
Better Health Information Promotes Better Health Care
State's Health Care Innovations Promote Affordable, High Quality Care

Senior citizens and young working families, businesses and government, and others throughout Wisconsin are concerned about the cost and quality of care. People want and deserve access to better care at prices they can afford.

Governor Jim Doyle and the Wisconsin Legislature have taken an important step to promote more affordable health care with newly enacted legislation. AB 907, supported by Governor Doyle and authored by Representative Gregg Underheim, unanimously passed the Legislature with strong bi-partisan support.

The legislation creates a public-private partnership – unique in the country – to collect and report information on real health care costs across our state in order to improve affordability and quality of care.

Consider, each time you make a purchase you make a value judgment about how much you are willing to spend for any product. Is it worth an extra \$500 to purchase a washing machine with 16 cycles instead of 6? Are you willing to pay an extra \$1500 for leather or a sunroof or a better stereo in your new car?

Right now, judging the value of the health care you receive is difficult because the information you need to make that decision is not readily available.

The good news is that state government and private sector leaders are working together to make sure everyone gets good care that they can afford. Developing a new system to report on health care costs is an essential step. It means that anyone will be able to receive understandable information about both the cost and quality of the doctors and hospitals that take care of them, and therefore make better decisions about how to spend their healthcare dollars. In the end, people will get better care for less money.

This legislation was developed by quiet teamwork among the Doyle Administration, legislative leaders of both parties, state agencies, and private sector leaders from insurance, health care and other businesses. It's an example of "good government" at work to produce a win-win solution for Wisconsin.

Under the legislation, the state will join a new non-profit organization, the Wisconsin Health Information Organization (WHIO), to develop the new system that will collect and report on the actual costs of entire episodes of care. WHIO will produce public reports on health care cost and quality. State funds from within existing budgets will match private sector funds to help develop the new system.

State government will also report on the care it purchases for public employees, retirees and citizens enrolled in programs like Medicaid and BadgerCare. As a purchaser, state government wants to make sure that taxpayer funds are used efficiently.

We applaud Governor Doyle, the State Legislature, and private sector leaders for coming together to improve health care for the people of Wisconsin.

Helene Nelson is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services.

Representative Gregg Underheim is the chairman of the Assembly Health Committee. The new legislation will replace the Physician Office Visit Data program which he also authored and passed in 1998.

John S. Toussaint, M.D., is the chairman of the board of the Wisconsin Health Information Organization and president and CEO of ThedaCare, Inc., a health system based in the Fox Valley.